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ABSTRACT

The importance of a child's relationship with the same gender parent, which influences their interactions with mothers and fathers is discussed. Forty 2-year-old girls and boys were observed in interactions with mothers and fathers at home, and behavior ratings were based on the following criteria: availability, warmth, and power structure. Results indicated little evidence that same gender parent modeling and imitation was more likely than opposite gender, although significant sex differences were observed in the above mentioned three criteria. (DST)

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MOTHER-DAUGHTER AND FATHER-SON RELATIONSHIPS

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MOTHER-DAUGHTER AND FATHER-SON RELATIONSHIPS

The particular importance of a child's relationship with the same-gender parent has been emphasised in several theoretical approaches to the understanding of gender differences in behaviour.

Social Learning theorists describe a three stage process for the development of gender typed behaviour.

1. First learning occurs and the child discriminates between gender typed behaviour patterns.
2. Secondly this learning generalises to new experiences.
3. Finally the child behaves in a gender-typed way.

Observational learning and imitation are stressed as the main processes for explaining how children accomplish the first stage and much of the learning is assumed to take place without direct reward. According to Social Learning Theory the same-gender parent is central as a figure to be imitated and identified with. Mischel (1966) likens the imitation to identification stressing that, although it is not assumed that children will only imitate parents, or that they will always take the same-gender parent as their model, it is assumed that the behaviour of fathers is particularly salient for sons and that of mothers for daughters, which in the past has generated a great deal of research looking at families without fathers (Biller, 1976; Lynn, 1974; Hetherington, 1972) and more recently non-traditional families who shared childcare or swapped roles (Russell, 1982; Radin & Sagi, 1982).

The process of modelling or imitation has been found in experimental studies to be more likely if the model is

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experienced by the child as available ,warm, nurturant or powerful. Thus the focus of Social Learning Theory is mainly upon how the parents will be construed by the child.

There have been many criticisms of Social Learning explanations of gender differences. Particularly that it does not adequately explain why it has been found in studies of father absence that both girls and boys are influenced by father absence and also that the effects differ depending upon the reason for the father's absence (e.g.through divorce vs through death). Another major criticism is that the attributes which are said to facilitate modeling and imitation, including availability, warmth,nurturance and power do not adequately explain WHY children should imitate the same-gender parent (Katz, 1979; Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974).

In Cognitive Developmental theories such as Kohlberg's and Block's, the behaviour of both parents is considered relevant, as examples of masculine and feminine behaviour which the child incorporates into their developing schemas of gender-typed behaviour, but their influence is not considered paramount; although once a child has established his or her gender identity and understood its permanence , it is likely that their relationship with the same-gender parent may be valued more.

Psychoanalytic theory also discusses same-gender child-parent identification, again once gender identity has been established. Freudian theory is of course very complex, but put simply, during the first 2 or 3 years both girls and boys are expected to identify with their mother,

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and later both with their father. Finally, girls resume identification with their mother once the Oedipal stage is resolved. In more recent psychoanalytic writing, the parent's identification has been highlighted and it has been suggested that a difference may be seen in the relationship which much younger children have with their mother. Nancy Chodorow (1978), an American Sociologist, proposes that mothers project their own identity on to daughters from very early on and consequently have closer, more intense relationships with girls than with boys. She suggests that female nurturance arises from this closer relationship and it has also been proposed that men are less sensitive to the emotional needs of others because they did not experience such an intimate relationship with their mothers when they were younger (Rubin, 1983).

In the context of some of the results from a study designed to compare parental behaviour with 2 year old girls and boys, two of the issues related to same-gender parent-child relationships were examined.

1. Whether the behaviour of the parents would facilitiate same-gender child-parent imitation and modeling. In particular were they more <u>available</u>, <u>nurturant</u>, <u>warm</u> and <u>powerful</u> with same-gender children?

2. Whether the mothers had closer and more intense relationships with daughters than sons.

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THE STUDY AND SAMPLE

The primary aim of the study was to look at ways in which a child's gender influenced their interactions with mothers and fathers. Two year olds were studied because it has been shown that knowledge about gender roles and sterectypes is being gained very rapidly from about that age. The sample, contacted at mother and toddler clubs in an outer London borough, was 40 families with first born children between the ages of 24 and 33 months. All were two-parent families. None of the mothers worked full time though some had part-time jobs. All the fathers were working outside the home, 57% in working class occupations and 43% in middle class jobs.

They were observed at home on two occasions, each session lasting for one hour. The father was at home for at least one of the observations and each parent was interviewed individually after the observations had been completed. The observation method was very similar to that used by Alison Clarke-Stewart (1973) and Judy Dunn (Dunn and Kendrick,1980) a modified form of continuous event recording, with a 10 second time interval. Observations were also tape-recorded so that verbal behaviour could be checked from transcripts. The rates of behaviours were transformed to scores representing the number of ten second units per thousand 10 second units. Full details of the method and analysis can be found in McGuire (1983).

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Availability of Mothers

Looking first at the availability of the mothers to their children, it was assessed by the total amount of time they spent jointly involved in play, reading together, watching television and shared housework.

- Table 1 -

This did not distinguish between mothers of girls and boys, (joint time: g=116.0, b=124.2 . Rates are 10 second units,per 1000 10 second units). The time which the mother and child spent out of each other's sight was also similar (g=85.8, b=96.0), but the girls did seek their mothers out more than boys. A total of the rates of following, approaching and clinging to mothers, requesting joint play and asking for the mother's attention was significantly greater for the girls (g=53.0, b=33.9).

Although they were not physically more available to girls, the mothers did take a more active and organising role with them during play, making more suggestions for activities, pointing out more items of interest in their surroundings and by offering more help, though giving help during play was not significantly greater for girls than boys (see Overhead). The mothers also made themselves potentially more available to the girls by narrating their own movements, for instance when leaving the room (means for narrate. girls=8.2, boys=3.7 $p<0.02$). By including all these behaviours together in one scale representing helping and organising, it could be seen that it formed a very consistent style of behaviour for mothers of girls, with a reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of 0.77, while the coefficient was close to zero for

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the boys' mothers (-0.03). Thus girls' mothers who offered and gave help often were also likely to make suggestions,tell the child what they were doing or point out interesting things while a boy's mother who gave a lot of help was as likely, for example to make make few or many suggestions or narrations.

Overall, therefore the mothers were not more available to girls in terms of the time spent together, but they more often organised and perhaps intruded with girls, and for those who did it was a very consistent pattern of behaviour.

Warmth

- Table 2 -

Warmth during observations was judged by the number of kisses, hugs and pats or strokes. A total of these did not significantly differentiate mothers with boys from those with girls, possibly because all were fairly infrequent, although the result was in the expected direction (girls=8.2;boys=5.6). Sitting together was divided into sitting and cuddling the child on the lap, cuddling but next to each other and sitting together but not in physical contact, The first two being considered more affectionate and warm . The difference was only significant for cuddling on the lap but both types of cuddling were more frequent in mother-daughter pairs. Therefore one could say that mother were behaving more warmly with girls than boys.

However, in contrast with the observations, when mothers were asked to describe their child, their feelings about them, as inferred from the interviews, presented a different picture. The descriptions were divided into those which were

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positive about the child, positive with at least one reservation, mainly negative or completely negative. Not only were significantly more descriptions of boys completely positive (16, 80% boys; 9 45% girls) the mothers also spontaneously mentioned having an affectionate relationship with boys more often than mothers of girls (12/20 60% boys; 3 15% girls) (e.g. He's really loving; he loves to cuddle).

Thus the mothers with girls in this sample behaved more warmly with their children but those who had sons spoke more affectionately about them.

Power

-Table 3 -

There are many subtle aspects of power within a family and power was not looked at directly in this study. Though it is by no means ideal , I have examined power in terms of parental attempts to gain power by using discipline or control with their child, since it is the child's experience of the parent as powerful or not which is relevant.

The mothers used more physical power assertion attempts with sons (See Overhead, a total of restrain, remove child or object and smack ; g=9.2, b=14.1), but within that total there was a trend for girls to be smacked more (girls=1.3, b=0.04). The frequency of smacking during observations was,as you can see very low, but this difference was confirmed during the interviews. Half the girls' mothers said that they needed to smack more than once a day while only 1 , that is 5% of the boys' mothers did. Mothers of girls also used more verbal control. Total verbal discipline was marginally higher (g=56.3, b=41.5) and both prohibitions

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and threats were significantly more frequent (prohibit:g=23.6,b=15.5; threat:g=4.8,b=2.2) with mothers actually gaining marginally more compliance to prohibitions from the girls (61% vs 52%).

But while the observations would suggest that the girls received more power attempts from mothers, the mothers did not describe themselves as more powerful with girls than boys. Only 4 (20%) of girls' mothers said that they were the stricter parent and 6 (30%) of those with boys. The majority (three quarters) of girls' mothers said that the father was stricter, while significantly fewer with sons did (35%). For girls there may be an implicit message that the father is actually more powerful while the boys are less likely to be presented with this idea.

FATHERS

AVAILABILITY

- Table 4 -

Turning now to the fathers, since they were out of the home more, it was in theory more possible for fathers to control their availability to children. During the interviews they were asked about recreational activities shared with their child and they reported overall only marginally more time with boys than girls. (total based on reports of five different activities: playing together after work or on days off, reading together, doing jobs together at home and going out without the mother) With a maximum of 10 possible if all activities were frequent, the mean for fathers of boys was 8.1 and for fathers of girls it was 7.3. The amount of time spent playing jointly during observation

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was also very similar for girls and boys, (g=226.0; b=277.4) as was child total proximity seeking (g=45.4, b=51.6) (See overhead).

In contrast with the observations, slightly more fathers with boys reported that they thought they spent more time with their child now than they had done when he or she was 12 months old(13 69% boys ; 9 45% girls). The men with sons were also more likely to say that they had a special role to develop specific (usually sporting) interests with their child, almost two thirds did (63%) while a similar percentage with daughters (60%) did not think that they had a special role, or would have in the future.

Thus the fathers described themselves as more salient to sons than daughters, but their observed behaviour did not reflect this.

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NURTURANT

Since these were conventional families it was the mothers who assumed the majority of the caretaking for girls and boys. The mothers were not questioned in detail about their caretaking activities. For the fathers, however, the extent of caretaking was, to a certain extent more a matter of choice. The fathers were asked about the frequency with which they carried out a number of caretaking tasks (e.g. prepare breakfast, cooked meal, dress the child, help on the potty or toilet, give a bath, put on nappy at bed time. take child to bed and get up in the night). A total of 16 was possible, depending on whether they did the task, frequently, sometimes or very rarely. Though the total showed a trend in the direction of more caretaking with sons (boys=9.3, girls=8.4) it was not significant. They only differed significantly on one task, giving a bath was more common for fathers of boys.

WARMTH

- Table 5 -

Paternal warmth was examined in the same way as for mothers. Cuddling on the lap was again more common with girls than boys, with no difference for the other forms of sitting together (See Overhead, girls=44.0, boys=17.3). A total of kisses, hugs and pats was also greater for girls (girls=10.8, boys=6.1) with a third of the girls receiving a lot of overt affection while only one boy did and a third of the boys were never kissed, hugged or patted by their father. Nevertheless, as was the case with mothers, more fathers of boys described their child positively (e.g. He's just a

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lovely little lad ; 12/19, 63% boys; 8 40% girls) and a third of those with girls described them negatively (she's just a little cow at the moment and that's the truth) while this was so for only one boy. The fathers are therefore very similar to the mothers in that they were observed to be warmer with girls but spoke more warmly about the boys.

POWERFUL

- Table 6 -

During the observations the fathers of boys were more physically controlling than those with girls (g=4.5, b=11.6). Total verbal control did not differ for girls and boys (g=30.7, b=41.0) but the boys were prohibited more often (g=10.1, boys=19.4). However the boys also complied with significantly more prohibitions than girls (63% vs 43%) which might suggest that they were more likely to respond to their father as powerful than girls, and that the greater amount of control was not the result of then defying their fathers.

However, during the interviews, significantly fewer fathers of boys said that they were the stricter parent in the family, (girls 12, 60% ; boys 7 37%). There was consistency between the parents on this matter in that 10 of the girls parents, half the sample,agreed that the father was stricter, only the case for 5 families with a boy.

Overall there was a small trend for fathers to be more power seeking with the same-gender child, as had been seen for the mothers, but this does not correspond with how they describe themselves.

CONCLUSIONS : FATHERS AND MOTHERS

Was it likely then that the same-gender parent would be

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observed and imitated more in terms of the qualities said to make modeling more likely?

- Table 7 -

Overall, in the context of these criteria the behaviour of these parents did not support the proposition. While by the very nature of the families the mothers were more available and nurturant to girls and boys than fathers, within those constraints there was very little evidence, particularly from the observations, that the mothers were more available to girls than boys or the fathers more available to the boys than girls, although the mothers did organise the girls more and the fathers described themselves as more salient to sons. Maternal nurturance was not expected to differentiate since they were the major caregiver and the reported child -care of the fathers was similar for girls and boys. Both mothers and fathers were warmer and more affectionate with girls, while at the same time speaking more warmly about the boys.

Mothers were in some respects more likely to attempt to assert power with girls than boys with the reverse pattern for fathers. However according to the parents descriptions, more girls than boys were likely to experience their father as the ultimate authority.

Although there was little evidence to indicate that same-gender parent modeling and imitation is more likely than opposite-gender, the discrepancies between interviews and observations may highlight some of the children's learning about gender appropriate behaviour, for instance that physical affection is more acceptable in male-female and

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female-female than male-male relationships, that men often have power or authority over women and that, while mothers take the main responsibility for child-care, there are special aspects which fathers will involve themselves in, generally those traditionally associated with masculine interests. While there is little support for the identification and imitation aspects of Social Learning Theory the results generally support a cognitive explanation, that children learn rules rather than copying specific behaviours.

Recent work has shown that very young children have quite sophisticated knowledge about gender typed behaviour and it is likely that they gain their knowledge from observations of their entire social world rather than modeling the same-gender parent directly .

THE MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP

Turning now to the second point, Chodorow's thesis that mothers and daughters share particularly intense relationships, the results are more supportive, although with the rider that the relationship is both close and ambivalent.

As I have already described, the mothers were seen to be more warm with girls than boys, they were also more controlling with girls both in terms of discipline and during play, by suggesting, helping and otherwise organising them, in a way which was very consistent. The one area in which the mothers were not more helpful to girls was in relation to self-help. During the observations they gave much less help with adjusting clothing, toileting, eating or tidying up toys to girls than boys and during the interviews they reported

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higher expectations for girls. More girls were actively being taught to dress themselves and to use all eating utensils correctly. Thus while the mothers were warm and affectionate with girls they also had higher expectations for self sufficiency and good behaviour,

It was found that not only was the "organise and help" scale more consistent for mothers of girls, but organising, affection and the amount of time spent jointly involved in play were quite likely to be at similar levels for mothers of girls, while this was not so for mothers of boys.

- Table 8 -

Those mothers of girls who spent a lot of time joinly involved (a total of joint play and reading or watching television and joint housework) were likely to be more affectionate ($r=0.56$) and to organise and help their daughters more ($r=0.46$), with affection and organising also positively associated ($r=0.54$). For the mothers of boys the pattern was not of warmth and joint involvement, but only of high levels of organising and help when there were more joint activities ($r=0.71$).

Of course interactions are not one-way events, it is possible that mothers were able to be more consistently helpful or intrusive or to sit for longer cuddling girls because the girls were perhaps more passive and quiet. In fact, as I have already described, the girls more actively sought their mothers' presence than the boys, by following, approaching or clinging to them, by asking for joint activities or attention. Though correlations cannot say anything about the order of event, some of the relationships

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between child and parent behaviour suggest ambivalence between mothers and daughters as well as closeness and involvement.

A correlations between total child proximity seeking and mother's affectionate behaviour was significant and posiive for boys (r=0.49) but there was little relationship between child and mother behaviour for the girls (r=0.06). In particular boys who came close to their mothers often or were more clingy were also likely to have mothers who kissed them more (r=0.60, approach; 0.56, cling) and boys who followed mothers about a lot had mothers who hugged more often (r=0.59). This was not the case for girls. While the overall correlation was minimal some of the relationships were negative. Those girls who followed a lot had mothers who gave fewer affectionate pats (-0.40), girls who approached more also had fewer hugs (-0.37) and more clinging was associated with less kissing (-0.31). The positive correlations for boys between proximity seeking and dmaternal affection are in line with mothers' descriptions, which stressed shared mutual affection. It seems that mothers may appreciate boys who like cuddling while there may be more tension invoked by girls who seek the same attention. Possibly mothers, in accordance with asserting more control and direction over girls, want the relationship to be more on their terms than their child's.

Furthers indications that there might be more tension in mother-daughter than mother-son interactions was derived from the correlations between child attention seeking and maternal discipline. Child proximity seeking was significantly and

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positively associated with the amount of verbal control received for girl (r=0.68) but only slight associated for boys (r=0.22). Girls who made many attempts to be near mothers were also likely to be criticised more (r=0.40), not the case for boys (r=0.01). There were similar trends for physical control, girls who sought out their mothers were likely to be the ones who were smacked or physically restrained more often (r=0.36) while for boys the correlation was small but negative (-0.29), less physical control was used by mothers of those who tried to be nearer to mothers.

Since it was shown that the higher levels of prohibitions and threats used by mothers of girls were probably not the direct result of more disobedience from girls, these relationships between child and mother behaviour might indicate that, although girls on one hand tend to be encouraged to be physically affectionate and close to mothers, those who seek more proximity are also likely to be those who experience more conflict and control.

This pattern of greater involvement, higher expectations, more affection, more criticism or control and more consistency both between maternal behaviours and between mother and child behaviour for girls could suggest that the mothers identified with daughters more than sons and were consequently more invested in them behaving in accordance with their own self image. The consistency might also be an indication that mothers have more confidence in their ideas about how to treat girls, while being more tentative about boys. It could also show that the very attributes which their behaviour might encourage in girls: passivity,

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compliance, competence in self-help and affection also led to irritation on occasion, since they are likely to involve the girls in wanting more of their mother's attention; while boys, who may have received more enccuragement to be active and assertive were less attention seeking overall. Alternatively it could indicate that the mothers identified with an abstract ideal of femininity, which they hoped for but which two year old girls did not conform to, leading to more dissatisfaction and intervention, while their perception of masculinity was more indulgent. The fact that both fathers and mothers were more negative about girls would suggest that it was an ideal of femininity which both parents were looking for rather than just mothers.

Overall, although one would need to question mothers directly about their own self-image and their perceptions of their child before Chodorow's proposition that mothers see themselves in their daughters could be more fully addressed, the results are consistent with a very close and intense mother-daughter relationship during the pre-school stage of development. In view of these results and the responses of fathers to questions about their role, I would suggest that mothers may identify with daughters and consequently become more intensly involved in their activities but that a cognitive component is also indicated, that they and fathers have a concept of appropriate feminine behaviour which is more restrictive while their perception of masculinity is more indulgent, which is very likely to influence the way mothers and fathers behave.

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Table 1. Availability of Mothers.

	Girls	Boys
Total Joint Activities	116.0	124.2
Out of Sight	85.8	96.0
Total Child Seeks Mother	53.0 **	33.9
Mother suggests activities	47.0 (*)	36.0
Mother points out interesting items	9.7 (*)	7.0
Mother Offers Help	4.3 *	2.4
Mother Gives Help, Play	9.0	6.4
Mother narrates about her activity	8.2 *	3.7
Reliability of "Organize/Help Scale (Cronbach's Alpha)	0.77	- 0.03

Key For All Tables

(*)	p	0.10
*	p	0.05
**	p	o.01

Units For all tables which refer to observation variables: Continuous variables (e.g. out of sight, joint time) are the number of 10 second units per 1000 10 second units of time. Verbal behaviour (e.g. suggest, offer help) could occur more than once within one 10 second unit of time and are rates per 1000 10 second units of time.

Table 2. Warmth and Affection: Mothers

	Girls	Boys
Kiss + Cuddle + Pat/Stroke	8.2	5.6
Sit together, cuddle on lap	19.7 *	4.5
Sit together, next to eachother and touching	19.1 (*)	4.1
Sit together, no contact	28.4	13.5
Description given in interview completely positive	9 (45%)	16 (80%) *
Mother-child affection mentioned in child description, interview	3 (15%)	12 (60%)

Table 3. Power and Control: Mothers

	Girls	Boys
Total Physical Control (Smack+Restrain+Remove)	9.2	14.1 (*)
Smack	1.3 (*)	0.4
Total Verbal Control (Prohibit+Demand+Threaten)	56.3 (*)	41.5
Prohibit	23.6 *	15.5
Threaten	4.8 *	2.2
Interview, mother says she needs to smack more than once a day	10 (50%) *	1 (5%)
Interview, Mother says she is stricter than father	4 (20%)	6 (30%)
Interview, Mother says father is stricter than she is	15 (75%) *	7 (35%)
(Remainder say that neither parent is stricter).		

Table 4. Availability and Nurturance: Fathers

	Girls	Boys
Total Joint Activity	226.0	277.4
Total child seeks father	45.4	51.6
Interview, joint recreation (out of a possible 10)	7.3	8.1 (*)
Interview, reported increase in time with child, 12 month old to present	9 (45%)	13 (69%) (*)
Interview, special role:		
Now	7 (35%)	12 (63%) *
In the future	1 (5%)	4 (21%) *
Not at all	12 (60%)	3 (16%) *
Interview, total caretaking (Out of a possible 16)	8.4	9.3

Table 5. Warmth and Affection: Fathers

	Girls	Boys
Kiss+Cuddle+Pat/Stroke	10.8 *	6.1
Sit together, cuddle on lap	44.0 *	17.3
Sit together, next to each other and touching	29.4	29.5
Sit together, no contact	17.5	28.7
Interview, description given completely positive	8 (40%)	12 (63%) *
Description completely negative	6 (30%)	1 (5%) *

Table 6. Power and Control: Fathers

	Girls	Boys
Total physical control (Smack+Restrain+Remove)	4.5	11.6 *
Total Verbal Control (Prohibit+Demand+Threaten)	30.7	41.0
Prohibit	10.1	19.4 *
Threaten	2.0	2.8
Interview, Father says he is stricter than Mother	12 (60%) *	7 (37%)
Interview, Father says that Mother is stricter than he is	3 (15%)	6 (32%)
(Remainder say that neither parent is stricter).		

Table 7. Parents as "Good" Models

	Mother	Father
AVAILABLE	Observe G = B	Observe G = B Report B > G
NURTURANT	(Not asked)	Report G = B
WARM	Observe G > B Report B > G	Observe G > B Report B > G
POWERFUL	Observe G > B Report G = B	Observe B > G Report G > B

Table 8. Intensity of the Mother-Child Relationship: Correlations between variables

	Girls	Boys
Joint time together & Kiss+hug+pat	0.56 **	-0.24
Joint time and mother organize/help	0.46 *	0.71 **
Organize/help and Kiss+hug+pat	0.54 **	-0.04
Child seek Mother and Kiss+hug+pat	0.06	0.49 **
Child seek Mother and Verbal control	0.68 **	0.22
Child seek Mother and Mother criticize	0.40 *	0.01
Child seek Mother and Physical Control	0.36 (*)	-0.29